Foreign visit by Ministers and Officials

1321. SHRI S. AGNIRAJ:
SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) how many visits by Ministers and Officials have been undertaken during the last three months of this financial year;

(b) what is the total expenditure involved in foreign exchange for these visits alongwith the details thereof;

(c) what measures are being taken to minimise such frequent visits;

(d) whether it is a fact that it has become a regular practice to go abroad without any purpose; and

(e) what steps are being taken to monitor such a trips to abroad?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (e) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Visit of US Under Secretary of State to India

1322. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD:
SHRI CM, IBRAHIM:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs had paid visit to India in the third week of May, 2000;

(b) if so, full particulars of the issues discussed and his reaction to India's stand on the resumption of talks with Pakistan; and

(c) whether he had held discussions regarding the start of Indo-Pak talks in the light of the released Hurriyat Conference leader?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Mr. Thomas Pickering, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, visited New Delhi on May 24-25, 2000 for Foreign Office Consultations and the Asian Security Dialogue with Foreign Secretary. The two institutional mechanisms are part of the wide ranging dialogue Architecture agreed, upon by Prime Minister and President Clinton during President Clinton's visit in March 2000.

(b,) and (c) The two sides discussed a range of bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern, including the evolving security situation in Asia. In the context of reducing tensions in South Asia, the US side expressed hope for the resumption of Indo-Pak talks. The US side reiterated its position, as articulated by President Clinton, namely urging restraint, respect for Line of Control, refraining from violence and for renewed lines of communication. The two sides also discussed the persisting problem of cross-border terrorism in India. The US side expressed understanding for India's position that Pakistan must Stop its support for cross-border terrorism and violence in Jammu and Kashmir and create the conditions for the dialogue to take place.

Issue of Passports

1323. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister o,f EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Passports issued all over the country from 1st April to 30th *June,* 2000, State-wise;

(b) the pending demand for passports in different States, as on date;

(c) the reasons for delay in issuing passports;

(d) whether more offices are proposed to be opened to facilitate easy issuance of passports; and

(e) the steps proposed to curb the backlog?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Details are given in the Statement-I *(See* below).

(b) Details are given in the Statement-II *(See* below). Pending demand for passports include those applications which are pending for over 35 days for want of police verification reports and those applications where police reports have been received but passports have yet to be issued.

(c) Reasons for delay in issue of passports *inter-alia* include receipt of negative or incomplete reports or non-receipt of reports from the Police Authorities; discrepencies in documents submitted by the applicants, particularly in respect of applications received by post and incomplete information from the applicants. The continuing shortage of staff including officers also contributes to delays.